PHILIPPINE PAPERS 8

Ferdinand E. Marcos

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I HAVE always been fascinated by the solidarity and spiritual union of intellectuals and writers. The student of history will indicate to you that such a spiritual union is demonstrated in the parallelism of not only of action but also of thought, of decisions by leaders as variant and disparate as those of the Western world and the Orient, where the recasting of ancient formulas, the remolding of the answers to age-old problems run the same course and are oriented in the same direction.

Today I see such a solidarity and I am fascinated by this, a solidarity in this symposium and among the writers. Realizing full well the famous temperaments of literary artists, I can not but remark this mystery, this phenomenon which has brought about the gathering of the masters of the written word in this symposium. And the question must perforce be asked: What is this strange alchemy, this force, this compelling passion that can so bind your clashing temperaments to one another that you can sit down and, in silence, listen to what could be a pretender like me?

Your theme, "Literature and the New Generations," may perhaps offer a clue. It suggests to me both hope and anxiety. Hope

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Excerpts from a speech of President Marcos during the opening ceremonies of the Afro-Asian Writers Symposium, Cultural Center of the Philippines, January 31, 1975.

for the continuing vibrance of literature in the life of man, and anxiety for the prospects of the endurance of the human race. Hope itself is not untroubled, for you will recall a noted writer did once say that the authority of the imagination is declining or has declined. "The era of the writer as the public says and the dependable informant has ended. It is dead." There must be some truth in this statement. What modern literary artist can compete with the anthropologists, the futurists, the psychologists, the occultists and the other social scientists in exploring with authority the infinite variety that is human life? Even words, the very tools of the literary artist, have now themselves succumbed to the accurate measurements by scientists.

What is the implication of all of this? The implication of all of this is that the creative writer is no longer "the unacknowledged legislator of mankind." This is not, as the poet would have it, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

But, of course, the lamentation has not stopped poets from singing and writers from writing. It will take more than the primacy of science to stop or even impede the making of literature. And of course if the authority of the imagination seems to be declining it is perhaps because, for the moment, it is meditating upon itself. But lest that meditation move into something more permanent, perhaps here in the Philippines I should announce what I have just decided upon as I was listening to these ceremonies.

I believe that as a contribution to this symposium, the Philippines should now consider the establishment of a creative writing center as part of the program of the University of the Philippines system. I believe that writers of Asia and Africa should find a place in which to meet and create in the Philippines, whenever their inspiration so commands. For writers need the society of other writers. As imaginative and intellectual

workers, they require the stimulation of other minds, in fact, perhaps the clash of opposing minds.

The creative writing center of the University of the Philippines, which I hereby direct to be established immediately, will, I hope, inaugurate a new era of productiveness in Philippine literature. For in the end, the creative writer will not have to seek a role and there are cases and there will be cases where his role will be thrust upon him both as a writer and as a man. Let me recall to you the Filipino writers at the turn of the century. Their compassion and their historical circumstance engaged their talents, first in clamoring for reforms from a colonial power that had dominated our country for four hundred years, a colonialism that had practically wiped out all our native literary tradition and vestiges.

And when this clamor for reform failed, it inspired, with their writing, the first Asian revolution that established the first Republic of Asia. It was Dr. Jose P. Rizal, the heroic leader of what is now referred to as the Propaganda Movement, who, by his novels, poems and all his writings, laid and established the moral foundation of that first revolution in Asia. It was he who said that the pen, as the times demanded it, must be wielded like a bolo, which is our native knife, to strike against the shackles of foreign imperialism. Familiar words, familiar terms, that have also been repeated here today.

And these great minds, Andres Bonifacio, the founder of the Katipunan; Apolinario Mabini often referred to as the Sublime Paralytic, for he was a paralytic; Antonio Luna, soldier, warrior, commanding general of all the troops of the revolution; Lopez Jaena; M.H. del Pilar and his brother, Gregorio del Pilar, who died rather than surrender to the American forces in the North, with all his men. All these were soldiers fighting for a cause, but they were, over and above all, first and foremost, writers and

intellectuals who offered their thoughts, their lives, their hearts to the cause of the revolution.

They were the public sages and the dependable informants of their times, because their writings, their literature touched, moved, inspired an entire people. In some, their love for their people and their historic circumstance determined, one might say, and once and for all, the orientation of their literary labors.

Of course, you, the writers and thinkers of Asia and Africa, especially those who have been awarded, are not strangers to that experience, to such a tradition, for you are all revolutionaries. There are moments when the hopes, the joys and the sorrows of an artist are commingled with the people, and the people's dreams and hopes invade the solitude of the writer's study. And quite often, these are times of great upheaval, of great change, such as the emergence of a new consciousness, at first, unrecognized by the great mass of people and identified and marked only by either the political leader or the writer, for often the political leader and the writer are partners in this endeavor.

The writers of the West themselves have known this experience, the Renaissance, the Romantic period and the Victorian age. All of these are great movements of human consciousness that generated masterpieces of literary art.

In Asia and Africa, however, I can see that we have just begun. We are just beginning. And this is possibly the strong force that binds all of you together now, that brings us together to exchange experience, to measure one another's vision and to contribute, communicate one another's commitment to one's particular art. This confrontation could enrich our minds, and it will enrich our minds. Enrich the minds of all the writers. But forgive me when I say that the significance of this symposium may well be found somewhere else. It may well be found on the conscience and consciousness.

We arrive, at this point, on the essence of the theme of this symposium. Beyond the papers that will be read and the opinions that will be expressed, there is the great question of whether there shall be new generations to write for. And this is at the back of the mind of everyone, leader and follower alike, writer and reader.

We write for the future, but will there be future generations to read our writings? The writers who inspire their people in the struggle for freedom in Asia and Africa knew that there would be new generations to inherit the ideals and fruits of revolution.

Today, are we sure that there will be such new generations? The prognostications of scientists and statesmen are gloomy enough to intimidate the authority of the intellect, of the imagination. The singular theme is that men is disturbing the delicate balance of his planet and perhaps of his universe. His passions, his agressions and his appetites do not encourage the survival of his species. He is his own greatest enemy.

OUR ACCELERATED science has proposed measures, charted options, but it has not come to the root of the question, which is man himself. Creative writers are explorers of the mysteries of the human heart which is, as the writers put it, in conflict with itself. Do you or do we have anything to reveal to the world, to the future? There must be something that the scientists have missed, some divine and vital spark that will revolutionize man, his consciousness all over again. A commanding image, a metaphor, a myth: all these for the survival of man. What is the politics of the imagination that will reap unity instead of dissension, glory instead of gore, understanding instead of enmity?

The great literary works written in ancient times attest to the survival of the human spirit,

of man himself above the violence of tragedy, the anguish and the pain of his existence. But we have entered an age where all the violence the tragedy, the anguish and the pain may be meaningless because of complete annihilation.

Moral decline and the experience of mankind, as we are wont to conclude, precede extinction.

The challenge to the man of the imagination, to our writers, is painfully clear. Can they, by their works, contribute to the renewal of man, or will the great literature of our time be written in the dust of a blown universe? This is the force, the compelling passion, I think, of your solidarity as writers, as creative thinkers, as intellectuals.

We are all fighting a revolution, not only a revolution of peoples, but the revolution of man. In the writer's creative pursuit of the true, the good, the beautiful may well depend the resolution of human hope and anxiety. □

A publication of the
Department of Public Information

Produced by the
Bureau of National & Foreign Information
5th Floor, Tuazon-Gonzales Building
Solana St., Intramuros, Manila
Philippines